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Title: Student Government Assembly Meeting Minutes

Stage: PASSED - 02/02/2005

Owner: Andrew Lara

I. Meeting Called to Order at 7:07PM

II. Roll Call #1

III. Open Forum

- Task Force for Curriculum Reform: Drew Carls
- American Red Cross: James Norris
- Mass CPR Training February 19, 2005
- only \$10
- Texas Revue: Jesus Castillon (refer to your agenda)

IV. Guests

- Breakthrough: Nina Bhatia

Rios: I move to suspend the rules and move appointments next on the agenda
Seconded, Motion Carries

V. Appointments

- One Year Remaining: Matthew Stolhandske
- Has cool ideas to work with international students and working with the legislature; all proposals are in the packet
- MaCleoud: motion to approve by acclimation
Seconded, Approved by acclimation

-Judicial Commission: Christine Winn, Sandra Menjivar, Sapan Shukla, Daniele Garcia, Michael Canalas
Ochoa: motion to approve by acclimation
Seconded and approved by acclimation
(Sworn-In)
Congratulations

VI. Executive Reports

- a. Senate of College Councils: Nick Staha
 - i. Following up on tuition process; Faulkner sent his recommendations to the Chancellor; there were two senate resolutions attached to the packet stating that two senate representatives should be present to discuss funding; president Faulkner has addressed that idea as well
 - ii. Curriculum: appointed Cal McDowell
 - iii. Faculty Appreciation Week Coming Up
 - iv. Integrity Week Coming Up; getting a lot of support from administration

Why It Works

For more than twenty years Senate and Student Government have simultaneously worked in the interest of UT students. This modern system has been very effective. Both Senate and SG have grown much more robust and each gained much greater access to decision-makers over that period of time. The college councils have expanded and obtained greater influence on the college level—this year, in fact, councils are making a historic step by creating processes to work directly with deans on budget and tuition matters. One needs to look no further than President Faulkner's recent tuition recommendations to the Chancellor to see that student interest is at the forefront of administrative policymaking.

While the modern system of student representation produces the greatest successes in student interest in the

University's history, over the past four years there has not been a single year in which there has not been substantial conflict between the Senate and SG. These conflicts are a source of great concern for some students. There seem to be three reasons for these concerns: First, some students have a natural tendency to want to avoid conflict. Second, some believe that administration might cherry-pick the views of whichever organization it feels would best serve its own interest. Third, some have said that too much time and energy are spent on Senate and SG engaging in a "spitting contest."

In addition to concerns over conflicts, many students wonder why it is desirable to have more than one student governance organization.

It is my goal now to dispel these concerns and prove why the modern system for student interest has been so successful when past systems have failed spectacularly.

We should not be afraid of conflict. Any successful structure of decision-making relies on conflict and conflict resolution to come to conclusions. Whether managing an organization, lobbying for an idea, or even making a purchase, anytime there is more than one person involved in a decision, there will be a conflict at some point. Is it, therefore, really desirable that Senate and SG avoid conflict? Representative governments and free-market economies have consistently outperformed their authoritarian counterparts for the past two hundred years for the precise reason that conflict-oriented decision-making works better than the alternative.

Some students have gone so far as to hypothesize that the modern structure for student interest was a sort of conspiracy by the Board of Regents to limit students' influence over decision-making. With more than one organization officially working on behalf of students, administration can serve its own purposes by siding with the organizations whose views are closest with its own. This is not a valid argument. Think of two different systems: In the first system, there are two student interest groups, A and B. In the second system, there is only student interest group A. There are two options, option 1 and option 2. Group A believes option 1 is the best, and group B believes option 2 is the best. Both groups make their arguments, and administration chooses option 2. Group A protests the decision. In the second system group A argues for option 1, and administration chooses option 2. Group A protests. In either system, Group A will have made the same argument and the same protest. Group B had no impact at all in the effectiveness of Group A. In real world terms, if SG were group A and Senate group B, SG argues that its views should carry great weight because it is directly elected, and protests the decision for option B on the same grounds. Senate has no impact on SG's effectiveness. This is fundamental to why the modern system works so well. When there is no conflict, as was the case on tuition policy this year, the perspectives and priorities each group brings on behalf of student interest are complementary. Senate focused on expanding student influence on budgets and tuition on the college level, and SG focused on protecting the Student Services Fee. Both items were accomplished. When the organizations do not have a natural conflict, which is a vast majority of the time, students are represented much better than if either Senate or SG had acted alone; this while there is no relative downside when there is a conflict. That is why students are making such good ground in terms of influence over policy.

Some have said that too much time and energy are wasted when Senate and SG are in times of conflict. This is partially true. Time should not be spent by either organization attempting to deny resources or otherwise impede the effectiveness of the other. In fact, the gains of the modern system are only realized when the student interest groups are actually independent of one another. One group should not have the ability to coerce the other. This fundamental requirement of independence is the primary reason for our decision to preserve our office space. Besides office space, there is another area where dependency must be address, and that's funding. At this same time, students must be assured that the advisory roles that are vested in student leaders are not abused for political reasons or personal grievances. As we are all observing, it is difficult to determine intent. And so our judgments should not be based on intent, but on conflicts of interest and potential abuse. This is problem I will be addressing in the near future. But there are two wonderful benefits for students when Senate and SG are in times of conflict: competition and accountability. Competition drives innovation and resourcefulness almost everywhere one looks. This same competition drives student interest organizations. Senate and SG are driven to having the biggest impact, being the most visible, or even producing the best website, all for the benefit of students. It is also possible for one of the organizations, or its surrogates, to call the other organization or its leadership to account. We saw an example of this recently in the Daily Texan. I welcome any views that anyone may have about my leadership or the work of Senate. I, of course, believe I have done excellent job in "capitalizing on the Senate's synergies," and believe Senate has had an extraordinarily successful year, substantially transforming itself while at the same time having unprecedented influence on policy. In any sense, those who are willing to call others to account are an important check in any system for student representation.

For many students, having more than one student governance organization may just not feel right. This is due to misnomer. The reason for having a student government (lowercase) in college is the same reason for having a student council in primary or secondary school: simply to teach civics. What are called student governance organizations are, in fact, not governments at all. They don't have the power to make law, confiscate property, adjudicate justice, or do any of things one would expect of even the most basic of governments. Student governance organizations are special interest groups to administration and real governments at the local, state, and federal levels. In this case the special interest is student interest. Senior citizens, environmentalists, gun-owners, and many other people have similar groups. This begs the question: "If one were design a special interest group for students at UT, what would it look like." I personally believe it would not look like something its not, that is, designed like a government. Although it is not appropriate at this time, I am more than willing to address the shortfalls governmental system applied to a special interest group. With the understanding that student governance organizations are actually special interest groups, we can move on to a fundamentally important fact and conclusion. Those people who are most effectively represented by special interest groups, senior citizens, environmentalists, gun-owners, and others, are typically represented dozens, if not hundreds of organizations. The reasons for their effectiveness are the same as why the modern system of Senate and SG is working so effectively for students. So why would we want to combine Senate and SG, as if often spoken of, or otherwise mitigate the influence of one or the other? On the contrary, we should seek to have each organization fully equal and independent. That is the best way to maximize the influence of students.

Gladney-Lemon: you accused our organization that we are impeding on your ability to due process; I am a little offended that you are accusing us of attacking you organization

Staha: it is difficult to determine intent; in any sense it can be misconstrued

b. Graduate Student Assembly: our first meeting this coming Tuesday in this room

i. George Mitchell Co-Op awards in excellence in graduate research; due Feb. 11th

c. President: Brent Chaney

i. We had a great application for our One-Year at large position

ii. Orange and maroon legislative day

1. next year, we can do better in attendance

2. A&M brought their dog

3. Went well, Rick Perry spoke

iii. Tax Free Textbooks is going well; Strayhorn is on the news with us

iv. Student Regent is moving along quite nicely

v. AP Credit; urge everyone to read senate resolutions on this issue;

Silvermintz: Texas Monthly, not one branch of SG in UT System schools complained about tuition deregulation; only six letters were received from individuals who could have done anything with tuition

Chaney: as for tuition deregulation in the past, Brian Haley's administration was there everyday

Stanis: Texas was suffering a 10 million dollar shortfall; we need our parents to send letters to their congressman;

Gladney-lemon: going back to Staha's

Stolhandske: has on VHS several leaders of UT campus on the floor on the capitol lobbying for students

d. Vice President: Rachel McGinity

i. Rep of the Week: Chris Kennedy

ii. E-bus last week: Monday Committee Meeting several E-bus officials are going to be ring the E-buses to see how crowded they can get; 5000 plus students riding the e-bus on average per week

e. Executive Director: Amy Chiou

i. Putting calendars in your boxes by the end of the week

ii. Is still meeting with Committees and Agencies

iii. Committee and Agencies: International Student Affairs, LRA and CEC

f. Internal Financial Director: appropriations are due this week

i. Will email the listserv with times that appropriation interviews will be going on

g. External Financial Director: meeting next week Monday at 7:00pm for the Student Activities Center

h. Attorney General: Amber Billingsley

i. Thank You to everyone who helped and participated with Safety Week

ii. Will be crediting your attendance for those who tabled during SW

iii. There are still 8 meetings left, so please do not begin to slack off

iv. Tower Plaque Project

VII. Representative Privilege

- a. Stewart: Brent and SG is respect down at the Capital
- b. Karchmer: Vagina Monologues; tickets will be going on Sunday next Monday on the West Mall; Safety Week was awesome! Good job!
- c. Gladney-lemon: brother is really sick in Houston; probably worse then last time; attendance may vary
- d. Brummett: give a shot out to Brent and our Wonderful LRA; talking about the nature of SG/Senate relations Alison from Senate is heading that
- e. Stanis: SBOR have a meeting with Brian McCall tomorrow; tonight the Pope was taken to the hospital; moment of silence;
- f. Ochoa: Internal Rules changes; chat sheet
- g. Chris Kennedy: improving registration; helpful if it showed you what your schedule would look like; email you if you get dropped
- h. Windle: entering library after hours, Fred Heath with general libraries is currently working on that; why is it closed to non-students after 10PM
- i. Bike Racks; Tax Free Textbooks packet, shoot Windle an email
- ii. The one real with product of an organization is its legislation
 - 1. 30 pieces of legislation from this assembly
- i. Stacey Gurevitz: online directory wasn't going to work; met with provost and think posting Professors office hours online was such a great idea that they are also going to include websites, etc
- i. RLM Math and Physics library: they only have eight computers

VIII. Committee and Agency Reports

- a. Student Advocates for Nonviolence: February is Sexual Assault Awareness Month; Take Back the Night Event which includes the survivor speak out; had first committee yesterday; looking for individuals who might be interested in coordinating; Feb 14th at 6:30pm on campus; contact Chris Vaughn if interested; Let me know if April 15 will interfere with anything; Also the Week of Women
- b. Communications Agency: get back to Danielle forms that highlights everyone's accomplishments
- c. FLO: If you ever have an event you want to publicize and you can speak of make it known at FLO
- d. LRA: internships get together at Scholz Beer Garden to give everyone the chance to network and get to know everyone better; LA101, have presentation to all the chairs on the 15th of February

IX. Unfinished Business

- a. AB 15: Creating the Historical Research Agency
 - i. One minor change was made
 - ii. Stanis: move to approve by acclamation
 - 1. Seconded, Legislation Carries

X. New Business

-None

XI. Announcements

Ross: Thursday and Friday Iron Spikes BBQ out in front of Gregory Plaza
Texan

XII. Adjournment**Footnotes**

None

Comments

None

Authors

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